

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks to the Ghanaian Parliament in Accra, Ghana

July 11, 2009

[A trumpet plays as the President prepares to speak.]

I like this. Thank you. Thank you. I think Congress needs one of those horns. *[Laughter]*
That sounds pretty good. Sounds like Louis Armstrong back there. *[Laughter]*

Good afternoon, everybody. It is a great honor for me to be in Accra and to speak to the Representatives of the people of Ghana. I am deeply grateful for the welcome that I've received, as are Michelle and Malia and Sasha Obama. Ghana's history is rich, the ties between our two countries are strong, and I am proud that this is my first visit to sub-Saharan Africa as President of the United States of America.

I want to thank Madam Speaker and all the members of the house of representatives for hosting us today. I want to thank President Mills for his outstanding leadership. To the former Presidents—Jerry Rawlings, former President Kufuor—the Vice President, Chief Justice, thanks to all of you for your extraordinary hospitality and the wonderful institutions that you've built here in Ghana.

I'm speaking to you at the end of a long trip. I began in Russia for a summit between two great powers. I traveled to Italy for a meeting of the world's leading economies. And I've come here to Ghana for a simple reason: The 21st century will be shaped by what happens not just in Rome or Moscow or Washington, but by what happens in Accra as well.

This is the simple truth of a time when the boundaries between people are overwhelmed by our connections. Your prosperity can expand America's prosperity, your health and security can contribute to the world's health and security, and the strength of your democracy can help advance human rights for people everywhere.

So I do not see the countries and peoples of Africa as a world apart; I see Africa as a fundamental part of our interconnected world, as partners with America on behalf of the future we want for all of our children. That partnership must be grounded in mutual responsibility and mutual respect. And that is what I want to speak with you about today.

We must start from the simple premise that Africa's future is up to Africans. I say this knowing full well the tragic past that has sometimes haunted this part of the world. After all, I have the blood of Africa within me, and my family's own story encompasses both the tragedies and triumphs of the larger African story.

Some of you know my grandfather was a cook for the British in Kenya, and though he was a respected elder in his village, his employers called him "boy" for much of his life. He was on the periphery of Kenya's liberation struggles, but he was still imprisoned briefly during repressive times. In his life, colonialism wasn't simply the creation of unnatural borders or unfair terms of trade; it was something experienced personally, day after day, year after year.

My father grew up herding goats in a tiny village, an impossible distance away from the American universities where he would come to get an education. He came of age at a moment of extraordinary promise for Africa. The struggles of his own father's generation were giving birth to new nations, beginning right here in Ghana. Africans were educating and asserting themselves in new ways, and history was on the move.

But despite the progress that has been made—and there has been considerable progress in many parts of Africa—we also know that much of that promise has yet to be fulfilled. Countries like Kenya had a per capita economy larger than South Korea's when I was born. They have badly been outpaced. Disease and conflict have ravaged parts of the African Continent.

In many places, the hope of my father's generation gave way to cynicism, even despair. Now, it's easy to point fingers and to pin the blame of these problems on others. Yes, a colonial map that made little sense helped to breed conflict. The West has often approached Africa as a patron or a source of resources rather than a partner. But the West is not responsible for the destruction of the Zimbabwean economy over the last decade, or wars in which children are enlisted as combatants. In my father's life, it was partly tribalism and patronage and nepotism in an independent Kenya that for a long stretch derailed his career, and we know that this kind of corruption is still a daily fact of life for far too many.

Now, we know that's also not the whole story. Here in Ghana, you show us a face of Africa that is too often overlooked by a world that sees only tragedy or a need for charity. The people of Ghana have worked hard to put democracy on a firmer footing, with repeated peaceful transfers of power even in the wake of closely contested elections. And by the way, can I say that for that, the minority deserves as much credit as the majority. And with improved governance and an emerging civil society, Ghana's economy has shown impressive rates of growth.

This progress may lack the drama of 20th century liberation struggles, but make no mistake: It will ultimately be more significant. For just as it is important to emerge from the control of other nations, it is even more important to build one own—one's own nation.

So I believe that this moment is just as promising for Ghana and for Africa as the moment when my father came of age and new nations were being born. This is a new moment of great promise. Only this time, we've learned that it will not be giants like Nkrumah and Kenyatta who will determine Africa's future. Instead, it will be you, the men and women in Ghana's Parliament, the people you represent. It will be the young people brimming with talent and energy and hope who can claim the future that so many in previous generations never realized.

Now, to realize that promise, we must first recognize a fundamental truth that you have given life to in Ghana: Development depends on good governance. That is the ingredient which has been missing in far too many places for far too long. That's the change that can unlock Africa's potential. And that is a responsibility that can only be met by Africans.

As for America and the West, our commitment must be measured by more than just the dollars we spend. I've pledged substantial increases in our foreign assistance, which is in Africa's interests and America's interests. But the true sign of success is not whether we are a source of perpetual aid that helps people scrape by; it's whether we are partners in building the capacity for transformational change.

This mutual responsibility must be the foundation of our partnership. And today, I'll focus on four areas that are critical to the future of Africa and the entire developing world: democracy, opportunity, health, and the peaceful resolution of conflict.

First, we must support strong and sustainable democratic governments. As I said in Cairo, each nation gives life to democracy in its own way and in line with its own traditions. But history offers a clear verdict: Governments that respect the will of their own people, that

govern by consent, and not coercion, are more prosperous, they are more stable, and more successful than governments that do not.

This is about more than just holding elections; it's also about what happens between elections. Repression can take many forms, and too many nations, even those that have elections, are plagued by problems that condemn their people to poverty. And no country is going to create wealth if its leaders exploit the economy to enrich themselves, or if police can be bought off by drug traffickers. No business wants to invest in a place where the government skims 20 percent off the top, or the head of the port authority is corrupt. No person wants to live in a society where the rule of law gives way to the rule of brutality and bribery. This—that is not democracy; that is tyranny, even if occasionally you sprinkle an election in there. And now is the time for that style of governance to end.

In the 21st century, capable, reliable, and transparent institutions are the key to success: strong Parliaments; honest police forces; independent judges; an independent press; a vibrant private sector; a civil society. Those are the things that give life to democracy, because that is what matters in people's everyday lives.

Now, time and again, Ghanaians have chosen constitutional rule over autocracy and shown a democratic spirit that allows the energy of your people to break through. We see that in leaders who accept defeat graciously—the fact that President Mills's opponents were standing beside him last night to greet me when I came off the plane spoke volumes about Ghana; victors who resist calls to wield power against the opposition in unfair ways. We see that spirit in courageous journalists like Anas Aremeyaw Anas, who risked his life to report the truth. We see it in police like Patience Quaye, who helped prosecute the first human trafficker in Ghana. We see it in the young people who are speaking up against patronage and participating in the political process.

Across Africa, we've seen countless examples of people taking control of their destiny and making change from the bottom up. We saw it in Kenya, where civil society and business came together to help stop postelection violence. We saw it in South Africa, where over three-quarters of the country voted in the recent election—the fourth since the end of Apartheid. We saw it in Zimbabwe, where the Election Support Network braved brutal repression to stand up for the principle that a person's vote is their sacred right.

Now, make no mistake: History is on the side of these brave Africans, not with those who use coups or change constitutions to stay in power. Africa doesn't need strongmen; it needs strong institutions.

Now, America will not seek to impose any system of government on any other nation. The essential truth of democracy is that each nation determines its own destiny. But what America will do is increase assistance for responsible individuals and responsible institutions, with a focus on supporting good governance: on Parliaments, which check abuses of power and ensure that opposition voices are heard; on the rule of law, which ensures the equal administration of justice; on civic participation, so that young people get involved; and on concrete solutions to corruption, like forensic accounting and automating services, strengthening hotlines, protecting whistleblowers to advance transparency and accountability.

And we provide this support. I have directed my administration to give greater attention to corruption in our human rights reports. People everywhere should have the right to start a business or get an education without paying a bribe. We have a responsibility to support those who act responsibly and to isolate those who don't, and that is exactly what America will do.

Now, this leads directly to our second area of partnership: supporting development that provides opportunity for more people. With better governance, I have no doubt that Africa holds the promise of a broader base of prosperity. Witness the extraordinary success of Africans in my country, America. They're doing very well. So they've got the talent; they've got the entrepreneurial spirit. The question is, how do we make sure that they're succeeding here in their home countries? The continent is rich in natural resources. And from cell phone entrepreneurs to small farmers, Africans have shown the capacity and commitment to create their own opportunities. But old habits must also be broken. Dependence on commodities, or a single export, has a tendency to concentrate wealth in the hands of the few and leaves people too vulnerable to downturns.

So in Ghana, for instance, oil brings great opportunities, and you have been very responsible in preparing for new revenue. But as so many Ghanaians know, oil cannot simply become the new cocoa. From South Korea to Singapore, history shows that countries thrive when they invest in their people and in their infrastructure, when they promote multiple export industries, develop a skilled workforce, and create space for small and medium-sized businesses that create jobs.

As Africans reach for this promise, America will be more responsible in extending our hand. By cutting costs that go to Western consultants and administration, we want to put more resources in the hands of those who need it, while training people to do more for themselves. And that's why our \$3.5 billion food security initiative is focused on new methods and technologies for farmers, not simply sending American producers or goods to Africa. Aid is not an end in itself. The purpose of foreign assistance must be creating the conditions where it's no longer needed. I want to see Ghanaians not only self-sufficient in food, I want to see you exporting food to other countries and earning money. You can do that.

Now, America can also do more to promote trade and investment. Wealthy nations must open our doors to goods and services from Africa in a meaningful way. That will be a commitment of my administration. And where there is good governance, we can broaden prosperity through public-private partnerships that invest in better roads and electricity; capacity-building that trains people to grow a business; financial services that reach not just the cities but also the poor and rural areas. This is also in our own interests, for if people are lifted out of poverty and wealth is created in Africa, guess what? New markets will open up for our own goods. So it's good for both.

Now, one area that holds out both undeniable peril and extraordinary promise is energy. Africa gives off less greenhouse gas than any other part of the world, but it is the most threatened by climate change. A warming planet will spread disease, shrink water resources, and deplete crops, creating conditions that produce more famine and more conflict. All of us—particularly the developed world—have a responsibility to slow these trends through mitigation and by changing the way that we use energy. But we can also work with Africans to turn this crisis into opportunity.

Together, we can partner on behalf of our planet and our prosperity and help countries increase access to power while skipping—leapfrogging the dirtier phase of development. Think about it: Across Africa, there is bountiful wind and solar power, geothermal energy, and biofuels. From the Rift Valley to the north African deserts, from the Western Coasts to South Africa's crops, Africa's boundless natural gifts can generate its own power, while exporting profitable, clean energy abroad.

These steps are about more than growth numbers on a balance sheet. They're about whether a young person with an education can get a job that supports a family; a farmer can transfer their goods to market; an entrepreneur with a good idea can start a business. It's about the dignity of work. It's about the opportunity that must exist for Africans in the 21st century. Now, just as governance is vital to opportunity, it's also critical to the third area I want to talk about: strengthening public health.

In recent years, enormous progress has been made in parts of Africa. Far more people are living productively with HIV/AIDS and getting the drugs they need. I just saw a wonderful clinic and hospital that is focused particularly on maternal health. But too many still die from diseases that shouldn't kill them. When children are being killed because of a mosquito bite, and mothers are dying in childbirth, then we know that more progress must be made.

Yet because of incentives—often provided by donor nations—many African doctors and nurses go overseas, or work for programs that focus on a single disease. And this creates gaps in primary care and basic prevention. Meanwhile, individual Africans also have to make responsible choices that prevent the spread of disease, while promoting public health in their communities and countries.

So across Africa, we see examples of people tackling these problems. In Nigeria, an interfaith effort of Christians and Muslims has set an example of cooperation to confront malaria. Here in Ghana and across Africa, we see innovative ideas for filling gaps in care, for instance, through e-health initiatives that allow doctors in big cities to support those in small towns.

America will support these efforts through a comprehensive, global health strategy, because in the 21st century, we are called to act by our conscience but also by our common interest, because when a child dies of a preventable disease in Accra, that diminishes us everywhere. And when disease goes unchecked in any corner of the world, we know that it can spread across oceans and continents.

And that's why my administration has committed \$63 billion to meet these challenges—\$63 billion. Building on the strong efforts of President Bush, we will carry forward the fight against HIV/AIDS. We will pursue the goal of ending deaths from malaria and tuberculosis, and we will work to eradicate polio. We will fight neglected tropical disease. And we won't confront illnesses in isolation. We will invest in public health systems that promote wellness and focus on the health of mothers and children.

Now, as we partner on behalf of a healthier future, we must also stop the destruction that comes not from illness, but from human beings. And so the final area that I will address is conflict.

Let me be clear: Africa is not the crude caricature of a continent at perpetual war. But if we are honest, for far too many Africans, conflict is a part of life, as constant as the Sun. There are wars over land and wars over resources. And it is still far too easy for those without conscience to manipulate whole communities into fighting among faiths and tribes.

These conflicts are a millstone around Africa's neck. Now, we all have many identities: of tribe and ethnicity; of religion and nationality. But defining oneself in opposition to someone who belongs to a different tribe or who worships a different prophet has no place in the 21st century. Africa's diversity should be a source of strength, not a cause for division. We are all God's children. We all share common aspirations to live in peace and security, to access

education and opportunity, to love our families and our communities and our faith. That is our common humanity.

That is why we must stand up to inhumanity in our midst. It is never justified—never justifiable to target innocents in the name of ideology. It is the death sentence of a society to force children to kill in wars. It is the ultimate mark of criminality and cowardice to condemn women to relentless and systemic rape. We must bear witness to the value of every child in Darfur and the dignity of every woman in the Congo. No faith or culture should condone the outright—outrages against them. And all of us must strive for the peace and security necessary for progress.

Africans are standing up for this future. Here, too, in Ghana we are seeing you help point the way forward. Ghanaians should take pride in your contributions to peacekeeping from Congo to Liberia to Lebanon and your efforts to resist the scourge of the drug trade. We welcome the steps that are being taken by organizations like the African Union and ECOWAS to better resolve conflicts, to keep the peace, and support those in need. And we encourage the vision of a strong, regional security architecture that can bring effective, transnational forces to bear when needed.

America has a responsibility to work with you as a partner to advance this vision, not just with words, but with support that strengthens African capacity. When there's a genocide in Darfur or terrorists in Somalia, these are not simply African problems; they are global security challenges, and they demand a global response.

And that's why we stand ready to partner through diplomacy and technical assistance and logistical support, and we will stand behind efforts to hold war criminals accountable. And let me be clear: Our Africa Command is focused not on establishing a foothold in the continent, but on confronting these common challenges to advance the security of America, Africa, and the world.

Now, in Moscow, I spoke of the need for an international system where the universal rights of human beings are respected and violations of those rights are opposed. And that must include a commitment to support those who resolve conflicts peacefully, to sanction and stop those who don't, and to help those who have suffered. But, ultimately, it will be vibrant democracies like Botswana and Ghana which roll back the causes of conflict and advance the frontiers of peace and prosperity.

As I said earlier, Africa's future is up to Africans. The people of Africa are ready to claim that future. And in my country, African Americans—including so many recent immigrants—have thrived in every sector of society. We've done so despite a difficult past, and we've drawn strength from our African heritage. With strong institutions and a strong will, I know that Africans can live their dreams in Nairobi and Lagos, Kigali, Kinshasa, Harare, and right here in Accra.

You know, 52 years ago, the eyes of the world were on Ghana. And a young preacher named Martin Luther King traveled here to Accra to watch the Union Jack come down and the Ghanaian flag go up. This was before the march on Washington or the success of the civil rights movement in my country. And Dr. King was asked how he felt while watching the birth of a nation, and he said, "It renews my conviction in the ultimate triumph of justice."

Now that triumph must be won once more, and it must be won by you. And I am particularly speaking to the young people all across Africa and right here in Ghana. In places like Ghana, young people make up over half of the population. And here is what you must

know: The world will be what you make of it. You have the power to hold your leaders accountable and to build institutions that serve the people. You can serve in your communities and harness your energy and education to create new wealth and build new connections to the world. You can conquer disease and end conflicts and make change from the bottom up. You can do that. Yes you can—[*applause*—because in this moment, history is on the move.

But these things can only be done if all of you take responsibility for your future. And it won't be easy. It will take time and effort. There will be suffering and setbacks. But I can promise you this: America will be with you every step of the way, as a partner, as a friend. Opportunity won't come from any other place, though. It must come from the decisions that all of you make, the things that you do, the hope that you hold in your heart.

Ghana, freedom is your inheritance. Now it is your responsibility to build upon freedom's foundation. And if you do, we will look back years from now to places like Accra and say, this was the time when the promise was realized; this was the moment when prosperity was forged, when pain was overcome, and a new era of progress began. This can be the time when we witness the triumph of justice once more. Yes we can.

Thank you very much. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:40 p.m. at Accra International Conference Center. In his remarks, he referred to Speaker of Parliament Joyce Adeline Bamford-Addo, President John Evans Atta Mills, Vice President John Dramani Mahama, Chief Justice Georgina Wood, and Deputy Superintendent of Police Patience Quaye of Ghana. The Office of the Press Secretary also released French, Arabic, Portuguese, and Swahili language transcripts of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Ghana :: Ghanaian Parliament in Accra.

Locations: Accra, Ghana.

Names: Anas, Anas Aremeyaw; Bamford-Addo, Joyce Adeline; Bush, George W.; Kufuor, John Agyekum; Mahama, John Dramani; Mills, John Evans Atta; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Quaye, Patience; Rawlings, Jerry; Wood, Georgina.

Subjects: Africa : Agricultural production :: Improvement efforts; Africa : Civil war and ethnic conflict; Africa : Democracy efforts; Africa : Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Africa : Economic growth and development; Africa : Energy, alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Africa : Food aid programs, U.S.; Africa : Government officials, corruption issues; Africa : Health and medical care, promotion efforts; Africa : HIV/AIDS epidemic, prevention and treatment; Africa : Human rights issues; Africa : Poverty and economic instability; Africa : President Obama's visit; Africa : Relations with U.S.; Africa : Trade with U.S.; Africa : U.S. assistance; African Union : Peacekeeping efforts; Botswana : Democracy efforts; Civil rights : Minorities :: African-American civil rights movement; Commerce, international : Group of Eight (G-8) nations; Congo, Democratic Republic of the : Civil war and ethnic conflict; Defense, Department of : Africa Command, U.S.; Energy : Developing countries, energy sources; Environment : Climate change; Ghana : Agricultural production, improvement efforts; Ghana : Chief Justice; Ghana : Counternarcotics programs and drug interdiction efforts; Ghana : Democracy efforts; Ghana : Economic growth and development; Ghana : Former Presidents; Ghana : Health and medical care, promotion efforts; Ghana : Peacekeeping contributions in Africa; Ghana : President; Ghana : President Obama's visit; Ghana : Relations with U.S.; Ghana : Speaker of Parliament; Ghana : Vice President; HIV/AIDS : Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, President's; Italy : President Obama's visit;

Kenya : Democracy efforts; Kenya : Poverty and economic instability; Nigeria : Malaria, prevention and treatment; Russia : President Obama's visit; Somalia : Terrorism; South Africa : Democracy efforts; Sudan : Darfur, conflict and human rights crisis; Zimbabwe : Democracy efforts; Zimbabwe : Poverty and economic instability.

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